

Advent Lutheran Church: Censorship – 6th Letter – December 8, 2011

To: Advent Lutheran Congregational Council
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Ladies and Gentlemen of our Church Council:

This is the **sixth letter in a series** addressing **Council's censorship of non-exempt material** and the controversy growing out of it. It is my intent, by posting this on the Internet, to show that there is a process by which a lone church member can hold officers accountable, and especially so when the process has been hijacked by those who control it.

In this letter I will discuss **bullying and intimidation** at the workplace, or at the church as the case may be.

Workplace bullies often operate within the established rules and policies of their organization and their society, or at least try to. There are many acts of bullying that may be encapsulated inside legitimate rules and procedure. A bully's biggest weapon is that he has the power to bully. It is not a personality clash. Bullying frequently occurs in a situation where there is an imbalance of power and where the act is unjustifiable. It is blatantly unfair, humiliating, malicious, and vindictive. There is no justification for it. A bully may use a discipline hearing or some kind of tribunal as a form of bullying. Prolonged bullying can have a cumulative effect on the target. To assist in managing by threat and intimidation, bullies tend to make up their own rules on the fly. A bully thinks he can abuse with impunity, and frequently does.

A bully frames his action as being in the best interest of the organization. He will use a combination of threatening, humiliating, and intimidating tactics because he can. A bully does not care about slighting the constituency that he is supposed to be serving.

Pair bullying involves two bullies working together, one active and verbal, the other often watching and listening. A bully knows there is safety in numbers. Let us examine a scenario and how it manifested itself in an instance of pair bullying at Advent.

1. At the last Congregational Council meeting that I attended, I wanted to speak briefly, at the time when members are almost always recognized for a brief statement. James Cassens refused to allow me to speak, even though any other member would have been allowed to. Then Council went into executive session and James asked me to leave.

I asked how long the executive session would last and James said about twenty minutes. I then gathered my food and material that I had brought to the meeting, and left the room. Council members all saw me preparing my stuff to get ready to leave, and they watched me walk out of the room.

2. Later in Council's letter of January 19, 2001 in the second paragraph, Council essentially states that it will not give me any of its time and that I should expend my time with a committee, failing to specify which committee.

3. Then on November 3, 2011 at a meeting with Pastor Beck, James Cassens, and Mark Dentler, Mark said that Council had tried to meet with me and that I was not willing to meet.

Council could have informed me that it wanted to communicate with me, and it chose not to. Council could have called me, and it chose not to. Council could have contacted me at any later time, and it chose not to. For Mark to make it appear that Congregational Council wanted to meet with me at an open meeting, and that I was not available, or that I had been unwilling for months to make myself available, is simply dishonest. While Mark was active and verbal, James was watching and listening. This is an example of two bullies working together with a common plan. I did not argue or complain at the time; I just let it go on.

Knowledge is power. It is important for any target to have a management technique for bullying. A target can either yield to the bullying; or attack back. Exposing bullying for what it is, is the best way to stop it. It is important to let a bully know of the heavy toll he will risk by preying on you. Using the Internet may be a good way to expose bullying.

It is important to assess the source of a bully's power. In our instant situation, the power is attributable to the bully's position as a church officer. And of course there is a power imbalance between the bully and the target (me). The bully has the power to exert overdue pressure, impose impossible deadlines, and inject unnecessary disruptions into the affairs of the target. Bullies get away with bullying (at least for a while) because of their power.

A bully tries to put the blame on the target, and will use his position to accomplish that. Due to an imbalance of power, it is easy for a bully to allege insubordination, failing to show respect for authority, and failure to follow arbitrary commands. Bullies sometimes retaliate against the target after a complaint has been filed or made public. A bully exhibits dictatorial tendencies, asserting that he is right because he says he is right. A bully is more likely to target a lone church member than a group of people that is making a lot more noise than the lone member.

Bullies usually have something they are self-conscious about or lack confidence about. Bullies react aggressively in response to provocation or perceived insults or slights. In the situation at hand, there is a correlation between my speech that Council officers would like to silence and the bullying and intimidation tactics that Council officers engage in. It is the content of my speech that stirs to action the bullying activities.

Over time, bullying activities becomes more apparent and may develop into a pattern or practice.

Council officers have used multiple methods to silence me. They have used the Adventure, and intimidating emails. They have alleged false intellectual property rights. They have used an intimidating letter. They have used intimidating meetings. They have abused the reconciliation process. They have disenfranchised me from the regular process of communicating with Council, and then had the audacity to insinuate that I had made myself unavailable to Council. They have tried to intimidate me into resigning my membership at Advent. Most recently they have given me a CITATION that is purely for intimidation.

Sometimes a bully makes **vexatious allegations** against his target. This involves allegations made without sufficient grounds, solely to harass or subdue a target. In my next letter I will address how ridiculous and meritless the allegations in the CITATION are.

Using a discipline procedure for intimidation purposes is wrong, and it undermines the personal integrity of all officers even if it is perpetuated by a few. **Congregational Council has a social problem among its members.** Council officers should work this out amongst themselves.

A bit of levity

Dealing with any controversy is always easier when levity is added. Council needs a more educated and sophisticated way of taking care of business. For inspiration on education and sophistication, watch **june carter and hank williams**. < <http://youtu.be/hLFfHRTA9mc> />

In light of Council's failure to provide an explanation for its censorship of non-exempt material, I looked for an explanation elsewhere. I believe I found one. An editor for *The Redneck Lutheran Lowdown* had an interview with a church leader of another Lutheran church about a similar censorship problem. It might be instructive in our present controversy. The interview follows.

The Redneck Lutheran Lowdown

Interview with Chummy Editor and Otto Autocrat, councilmember of the Hardcore Lutheran Church.



Chummy Editor



Otto Autocrat

- Chummy: Hi, Otto.
- Otto: Hello, Chummy.
- Chummy: Otto, let's talk about a controversy that has been brewing in Hardcore Lutheran Church.
- Otto: Yes. You're talking about the non-exempt material stuff and how us cronies restricts access to it, especially the digital stuff. And we ain't lettin' go of it.
- Chummy: Has the Cronie Board dealt with this in the public agenda? That's the monthly meeting that the congregation can attend.
- Otto: No we have not. This is not a topic that needs any significant discussion in our public agenda. We prefer that a church member expend his time arguing about this in a dead-end committee. That way, us cronies won't have to bother with it.
- Chummy: Some would say that is self-centered.
- Otto: Oh, no! We do that out of consideration. When you consider the value of our time. We need to spend our time doing more important stuff.
- Chummy: This is not a situation where one person has offended another person. This deals with fundamental authority and fundamental expectations of a church member.
- Otto: I do not see it that way. Listen. Ifun a member has a conflict, a disagreement, a matter of unhappiness, and this includes a controversy over censorship, there is a 3-step process for dealing with this in a healthy way. Since, allegedly, each Council officer would be acting outside his duties, this would be a one-on-one conflict with each officer. A total of over a dozen conflicts.
- Chummy: Yes.
- Otto: A 3-step process should be used on each of the dozen or so Council officers. If you have trouble understanding this you can read Matthew 18:15-17 and Chapter 15 of our constitution. This would be a total of 36 steps, assuming 12 controversies.

Chummy: Yes, 36 or more steps.

Otto: Then there is the resolution process set out in the Hardcore Constitution. This too requires another 36 or so steps.

Chummy: Thirty-six and thirty-six. That's twelve and carry one. Then that's six then seven. That's seventy-two steps, or maybe more. Seventy-two. That's a lot.

Otto: That sounds about right.

Chummy: How long does each step take?

Otto: Well, resolution is a serious matter. So one should not get in a hurry.

Chummy: But how long does this all take?

Otto: Perhaps a week or two for each step.

Chummy: Hmmm. How often do you Hardcore Lutheran folks elect officers?

Otto: Once a year.

Chummy: This all sounds like a waste of time to me.

Otto: You're right. It is. But we want church members to know that there is a process to follow.

Chummy: What purpose does the process serve?

Otto: It keeps any of our grumbly bretherin busy. People need to be kept busy.

Chummy: But, Otto. Most people are not stupid enough not to see what's happening.

Otto: That don't matter. As long as they ain't no complaints.

Chummy: This is a very unusual philosophy that you're telling me.

Otto: Yes, but money is the end result.

Chummy: Does the end justify the means?

Otto: Yes. When it comes to our budget, yes. And just to emphasize the importance of a budgetary matter, visit old Lefty Frizzell singing **If You Got The Money Honey**.
< <http://youtu.be/vYUr4wNdDZc> />

Chummy: Well our time is up. Thanks for the interview.

Otto: Yep, I can hardly wait for the next one.
